

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Yasuhisa Kawamura  
At International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2018 Dec. 3rd  
(617 words)

Thank you for your kind introduction.

It is my great honor to deliver opening remarks as a co-sponsor of the events commemorating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. I wish to extend my appreciation to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and all involved in the dedicated efforts to prepare this event.

This afternoon's panel discussion will focus on how to develop an integrated approach for smart and inclusive cities that are accessible to all. Article 9 of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities obligates States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities access to facilities and services, on an equal basis with others, and Article 19 of the Convention recognizes the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others.

Full and effective participation and inclusion in society is a key principle of the Convention and fundamental policies must be taken to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities.

Japan will host the Tokyo Paralympic Games in 2020. People with and without disabilities from all over the world will gather at the Paralympic Games and directly experience overwhelming performances by the Paralympians. This event has been providing us with opportunities to move our society towards full inclusion.

In March this year, Japan finalized its Fourth Basic Program for Persons with Disabilities, which is a five-year master plan on

policies for persons with disabilities and sets clear benchmarks with concrete goals to realize “Evidence Based Policy Making.”

Benchmarks include such goals which should be achieved by the fiscal year 2020:

- Passenger facilities handling more than 3000 passengers a day and major roads must achieve the target of 100% barrier-free access
- Railway vehicles must achieve 70% barrier-free access

Activities to move our society towards full inclusion are not only limited to metropolitan areas but are also undergone in local communities.

The “Inclusive Society Host Town” project, created in anticipation of the 2020 Paralympic Games, encourages local retailers to renovate their shops for full accessibility, and encourages communities to team up with Para-athletes and persons with disabilities for community projects such as redesigning barrier-free local maps. Through these direct interactions, localities will have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives regarding persons with disabilities.

This expansion of a culture of respect for diversity is also happening in the private sector and among student youths.

Students at the University of Tokyo created the “Empower Project,” a student led initiative wherein those wearing the project’s Magenta Star Badge can identify themselves to persons with disabilities, both outwardly visible and not, as supporters ready to provide help if requested. This activity could eliminate barriers that hamper the social inclusion of all persons, especially those who do not wish to disclose their situation or who have challenges that

cannot be identified by appearance. The project was also introduced at this event last year by the students themselves, and they have organized several events to promote their project with UNFPA, UN-Women, and UNDP.

The 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games hosted by Japan was the first event to formally use the term “Paralympics” in association with the games, and already more than half a century has passed since then. During this time, our understanding of disabilities has shifted to the “Social Model,” which recognizes that barriers do not exist on the side of individuals, but rather on the side of society which hampers individuals from full social inclusion.

Leading up to this important moment, Japan is making use of universal design and information and communication technologies to build a society with full inclusion for all. I expect that productive discussions on good practices and current challenges will be held today.

Thank you.